

The
Legend of the
Christmas
Rose

Henry E. Jackson

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THE LEGEND OF THE CHRISTMAS ROSE

The Legend of the Christmas Rose

*FIVE CHRISTMAS PAINTINGS
AND THEIR INTERPRETATIONS*

✓ BY
HENRY E. JACKSON, M.A.

AUTHOR OF "BENJAMIN WEST, HIS LIFE AND WORK"
"GREAT PICTURES AS MORAL TEACHERS," "THE
MESSAGE OF THE MODERN MINISTER"
"THE MEANING OF THE CROSS"
"THE NEW CHIVALRY"

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TO THE BEST OF ALL INTERPRETERS
OF THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT,
MY LITTLE CHILDREN,
ROBERT AND RUTH.

“There’s a song in the air!
There’s a star in the sky!
There’s a mother’s deep prayer,
And a baby’s low cry!
And the star rains its fire while the Beautiful sing,
For the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King!

“There’s a tumult of joy
O’er the wonderful birth,
For the Virgin’s sweet boy
Is the Lord of the earth!
Aye! the star rains its fire, and the Beautiful sing,
For the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King!

“In the light of that Star
Lie the ages impearled;
And that song from afar
Has swept over the world.
Every heart is aflame, and the Beautiful sing,
In the homes of the nations that Jesus is King.”

—*J. G. Holland.*

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“Two sorrie Thyngeſ there be—
Ay, three;
A Neste from which ye Fledglings have been taken,
A Lambe forsaken,
A redde leaf from ye Wilde Rose rudely shaken.

“Of gladdē Thyngeſ there be more—
Ay, four;
A Larke above ye olde Nest blythely singing,
A Wilde Rose clinging
In safety to a Rock: a Shepherde bringing
A Lambe, found, in his armes, and Chrystemasſe
Bells a-ringing.”

—*Old English Song.*

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P R E F A C E

A rosebush produces thorns: it also produces roses. One may complain because thorns accompany roses, or he may rejoice because roses accompany thorns. What one sees in a rosebush depends most of all on whether he is looking for thorns or for roses.

The Christmas festival, more than any other, compels one to think of roses rather than of thorns. Whatever thorns accompany the Christian view of life, the ultimate test of its worth is the kind of roses it produces. Of all the roses that have bloomed in history for the refreshment of the human spirit, certainly the best, by common consent, are those grown in the soil of the Christmas garden. From this garden the author has gathered five which he considers the most beautiful.

The Christmas rose, reproduced in the first painting and described in the first chapter, although one of Nature's wonders, is significant chiefly because it is a symbol of something more beautiful than itself. It is used here as a symbol of sentiments whose seeds were planted at the first Christmas to grow in human hearts.

In plain words, these five chapters seek to

P R E F A C E

unfold at least five of the fundamental ideas that have made Christmas what it is. They constitute the real spirit of Christmas and embody its rich meaning for human life. All that the author has done is to furnish a vase for this little cluster of five Christmas roses, and to arrange them in it as best he could.

While he sincerely wishes that the vase was more worthy of the flowers, yet the roses themselves have given such good cheer to his own heart, that he offers them to others in the hope that their beauty and fragrance may bring comfort to the lonely and courage to the disheartened. The need to decorate life with a touch of beauty and brighten it with a touch of joy is universal. The roses here presented are designed to meet this need, because they can be grown in the friendly soil of any human heart, and like the famous rose of the legend, they continue to bloom whatever the external wintry conditions may be.

HENRY E. JACKSON.

Montclair, N. J.

THE LEGEND OF THE CHRISTMAS ROSE

FROM A PAINTING BY ALFRED HITCHENS

The original of this picture is owned by Mr. Charles G. Phillips, and is at present in the Christian Union Congregational Church of Upper Montclair, New Jersey. The photograph from which the cut was made is published by the Berlin Photographic Company, New York.

“In the bleak midwinter
Frosty winds made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone.
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter
Long ago.

“Enough for Him whom cherubim
Worship night and day,
A breastful of milk
And a mangerful of hay;
Enough for Him whom angels
Fall down before,
The ox and ass and camel
Which adore.

“What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb.
If I were a wise man
I would do my part,
Yet what I can I give Him:
Give my heart.”

—*Christina Rossetti.*



THE LEGEND OF THE CHRISTMAS ROSE
BY ALFRED HITCHENS

INTERPRETATION—ROSES THAT
BLOOM AT CHRISTMAS

“The Winter is a time of Hope,
A time when hearts are lighted up:
Hey-ho for the mistletoe,
The silver frosts and the white snow!
For at the core of winter lies
The hidden heavenly mysteries.
When Robin sings on a bare thorn,
Then Jesus Christ our Lord is born.

“Who sighed for Summer and the rose?
A Rose is born in frost and snows:
Hey-ho for the holly red!
Christ is laid in the cattle’s bed.
Hey-ho for the Yule-log brown!
Christ is born in Bethlehem town.
The Winter gathers for her own
The sweetest Rose was ever blown.”

—*Katharine Tynan.*

ROSES THAT BLOOM AT CHRISTMAS

IF the last rose of summer touches man's heart with tender regret for nature's parting gift of beauty, the first rose of winter refreshes it with unexpected comfort. Roses in mid-winter seem as strange as snow in mid-summer. When nature produces winter roses she appears to be playing the role of a magician. True, it puzzles our sense of the fitness of things, and yet it is not a fairy tale but a fact, that there are roses which do grow in the snow. The more one becomes familiar with nature's inexhaustible power of adaptation, the more one feels that winter roses, while unexpected, are not at all surprising.

The name of the winter rose is *helleborus niger*, so called because of its black root. The common name with which it has been christened is much more beautiful; it is the "Christmas rose." It blooms from November until March, and blooms under a blanket of snow. It is hardy as far north as New York state.

THE LEGEND OF THE CHRISTMAS ROSE

The flowers are waxy white, five-petaled, and from two to five inches across. The plant bears but one leaf. The petals contain nectar for insects. The flowers never wither, but turn pink and then greenish before they drop from the stem. Among the varieties of the Christmas rose, the tallest and earliest to bloom is *altifolius*. Its flowers are the largest and have a slight fragrance.

This flower has for us the same charm as the edelweiss, blooming amidst eternal snow and well deserving its name, "noble-white," because it likewise achieves its bloom and beauty through conflict with hardship. Every one who has ever seen a Christmas rose shares instinctively the feeling expressed by the poet Mackay,

"Though we bless the flower of June,
And all its charms remember,
We've double blessings for the rose
That blossoms in December."

The Christmas rose is such an unusual gift of nature, that primitive and simple-hearted folk thought they could account for its existence only by appealing to a miracle. It is this motive that gave birth to the legend founded upon the winter rose. The legend is an attempt

to explain what seems to be one of nature's miracles.

The story centers about a little flower girl, very poor, who was the first girl to visit the Christ-Child when he was cradled in Bethlehem's manger. In the English story she bears the name of Madelon. According to the Italian version, she was the daughter of one of the shepherds. As she heard them telling about the new-born bambino, she became possessed with an eager desire to see this strange little king. When the shepherds started on their wonderful quest to the stable, she silently crept along behind them, trying always to keep out of sight lest they should turn her back. By the time she arrived in the village street of Bethlehem she was foot-sore and weary, but all her weariness was forgotten in the hope which had brought her to this strange place on this strange night.

When the shepherds entered the stable, Madelon stood at the entrance entranced with the sight of the little king, and the pilgrims who did him homage. She saw the rich gifts which the Wise Men had brought. She saw also the humbler gifts of the shepherds, the loaf of barley bread, the home-made cheese and the fleece of lamb's wool, white and soft, fit to

wrap around a baby's limbs this cold winter night.

As she looks upon these gifts, her own heart is stirred by childhood's native spirit of generosity. What shall she do? Shall she remain outside? How can she enter when she has no gift to offer? She, too, must give of her best. The best she ever had to give was flowers. But there are no flowers now, for it is winter, nor has she a farthing of money with which to buy anything else. She looked down at her little empty sun-browned hands, and a great sob rose in her throat. To have the impulse to love without the means of expressing it, is real pain, and Madelon burst into tears.

Madelon's tears were not seen by any one about the new king, for she was outside the stable door, but they were heeded by an unseen helper. It is a beautiful Christian tradition that every little child has a guardian angel. Jesus said that a child's guardian angel, or messenger, was always heard first in the court of heaven. A request from a little child in trouble, according to Jesus' estimate of the child's importance, is considered before the request from a statesman who is directing the destinies of his country, or the request of a general on the eve of battle, or the request of a philosopher

who is wrestling with the hard problems of life.

Richter, the German artist, has painted many pictures to illustrate the beautiful idea of guardian angels. He painted the child angels who sit talking to mortal children among the flowers, now holding them by their coats, lest they fall upon the stairs, now with apples enticing them back when they draw too near the precipice. He painted the angels who ring in the chambers of memory the sweet mother's name, when the boy grows tall and is tempted. He painted the angels who come in the garb of a pilgrim made ready for guidance to the heavenly land when life's pilgrimage is done.

In the story of the Christmas rose, a guardian angel is the connecting link between a child's need and the great discovery which grew out of it. In response to Madelon's tears, her guardian angel, Gabriel, took her by the hand and touched the ground with his stick, when lo, rich flowers sprang up on every side, and the little flower girl was supplied with a gift which best represented her spirit.

It is this legend which Alfred Hitchens' painting represents. The picture depicts the moment when Madelon is making to the Christ-Child in the stable her little votive offering, the

heaven-sent gift born of her love, a handful of Christmas roses. The roses Mr. Hitchens has represented on his canvas and placed in Madelon's hand can be recognized readily as belonging to this variety.

The artist has introduced into his picture baby angels who smile approval and Gabriel himself, who stands in reverent worship before the humble gift of homage from the child's pure heart. Mr. Hitchens' power is most apparent in his treatment of the little peasant girl, for whom his wife was the model. She is in fact, as well as in position, the center of the picture and the chief object of interest. So awed is she in the presence of the Christ-Child, that she ventures only with a shy and self-conscious delicacy to lift her eyes away from the roses in her hand to look at the child. There is in her attitude such reverence touched with timidity that the appeal she makes is direct and tender.

A child's tears, a guardian angel, and winter roses preserved in story and painting, these constitute the beauty and pathos mingled together in one of the most significant of all Christmas legends, a legend which comes down to us by way both of Italy and England. In the story a child's tears touch the heart of a guard-

ian angel, as they always do, and the guardian angel touches winter roses into summer bloom. That roses really do bloom in the snows of mid-winter will be surprising news to many. It is one of nature's wonders, but it is not the most wonderful part of the story. It is not as wonderful as to see roses of love bloom in the soil of human hearts that are naturally wintry. The legend is true, not with the truth of incident, but with the truth of character. Of course, legends are not careful about dates and details. The Wise Men, it is true, did not present their gifts in the stable, for Mary and her little son had moved into a house before the Wise Men had arrived. It is a poetic fact, not an historic fact, which the legend embodies. Goethe said that poems are painted windowpanes. The same is true of legends, for legends and folk-lore have preserved for us the basal realities of human experience.

The legend of the Christmas rose is such a painted window-pane, and what we see through this painted window is indeed the great discovery of the Christian ages; the discovery that Christian love is the greatest creative agency in human life; that idealizing love has the power to create the thing it desires; that the love which the Christ-Child brought to our world

brings the roses of spring into wintry and ice-bound human hearts. Is not this the first and fundamental meaning of Christmas?

By saying that a little flower girl's desire for them produced winter roses, the legend means to state the principle that love is creative. Love is creative because it increases with use. When Dante said of the reeds which grew on the purgatorial shores, that whenever one was plucked up, two grew in its place, he was saying that all spiritual goods, when shared, do not decrease, but increase.

“True love in this differs from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take away.”

The Master of the Holy Grail announced the same discovery to Sir Launfal at the end of his unsuccessful quest.

“Who gives himself with his alms feeds three,
Himself, his hungry neighbor and me.”

By feeding another, he had not less for himself, but more. Love gains by giving. The act of love creates the love itself. Love's very desire to serve produces the roses with which to serve.

The principle embodied in this legend is well stated in a beautiful little poem called the “Ruby Heart,” by Edward Rowland Sill. The poem

was written for children, but it contains the central idea which the Christmas Babe came to make clear to men. The poem says that a tiny fairy used to dwell under a fragrant blossom-bell. Everything about her was beautiful and clad in rainbow hues, but the fairy's soul was sad because there was no creature that she loved. She used to sing to herself the song of Coleridge:

"He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all."

But it was of no use; her heart remained unmoved. Wandering one day by the brook alone, she picked up a white pebble stone, and carved it into the shape of a little marble heart. "It is no more possible for me to love," she said, "than for this white stone to turn ruby-red."

Wakened one night by a moonbeam, the fairy saw an angel who said he had come to teach her how to love. "The way to love," he said, "is to do every day some little deed of kindness, feed some faint creature, and stop the bleeding of some hurt spirit, then carve the record of each deed of love every night on the heart of

marble white, and each word shall blush into a ruby-red." "By some blessed moral law," said Kingsley, "the surest way to make oneself love any human being, is to go and do him a kindness." This is what the angel said to the fairy. The poet means to say that the creative power of love is so great that it can turn hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.

Through the magic touch of this new power, the fairy's world became a new world, just as the sky, at the close of the twilight hour, seems to be empty blue, and then suddenly becomes one sweep of stars. All the little creatures now that she had learned to love, became to her suddenly beautiful. Each little ugliness was concealed, and each goodness more and more revealed. This is not to say that the love which she had acquired so blinded her that she could not see the ugliness.

It is as far from the truth as it can be to say that love is blind, for nothing is so keen-eyed as love. If you want to know a man's defects, ask his wife. She will not tell you, but she knows, and knows better than anyone else. Love is said to be blind, only because its habit is to shut its eyes deliberately to defects and center its attention on the possibilities in order to make them grow. Oh, yes, love knows the defects.

The vast courage of love lies in the fact that it can endure this knowledge and still continue to live. Thus does love idealize its object. This is what love is for, and this is why it is creative. If any man wishes to help his fellow men, he can do so far more effectively by exhibiting truth than by exposing error; by unveiling beauty than by a critical dissection of deformity.

The creative power of this new affection is the great discovery which the Christmastide celebrates. So original was the idea, that a new word had to be created for it. No word for love, in the new sense, existed. The old words had only a domestic or sentimental significance. They were symbols chiefly for a physical sensation. The Christ-Child made it stand for a new kind of passion in human experience. It was because no word existed to express the new idea, and in order to purge the old one of its ignoble reputation, that Paul, writing his matchless poem on love, found it necessary to describe elaborately the idea itself, stating carefully what it was and what it was not. "Love bears long with offenders and is helpful; love is not envious; love does not behave unbecomingly; seeketh not her own things; is not irritable; does not store up in

memory injuries received; rejoices not in injustice, but rejoices with the truth; silently endures all experiences, trusts in them all, hopes in them all, is patient under them all."

The transformation of this word is a romance in the history of language. Love was born again a new and different thing. The world still uses the term "love," to express the isolating passion of one sex for the other. Jesus made all love to be one divine thing. He made it stand not only for the love of one sex for the other, but for the love of home, of friends, of ideas, of truth, of country, of mankind, of God. He made it to be a great moral principle. He made it impossible for a selfish love to exist, for he made it to be a contradiction in terms. If it is selfish, it is not love; if it is love it is not selfish. He made it to be not only a feeling, but a principle under the control of the will. He made it to be the law of gravitation in the moral world. He made love and God to be synonymous terms. He offered it as the one remedy for all the personal and social problems of human life. He made love the one prize of life worth pursuing. Bacon quoted with approval the saying that 'It is impossible to love and to be wise.' Browning answered that it is impossible to love and *not* be

wise. Wherever this new love reigns *roses* bloom the year round.

It was an audacious plan which the little King born in Bethlehem proposed later in his life, when he said he would reconstruct the whole world and create a new social order through the creative power of a new affection. His idea of universal imperialism is unique, daring, and without parallel. This obscure Galilean, who had never been outside his own country, with no army, no navy, no treasury, no staff, out of favor with both Church and State, calmly announces to his amazed friends, that a new social order, which he called the Kingdom of Heaven, shall one day have universal dominion with himself as king, and that it is to be established through no other agency than that of love.

Hope for the success of this plan lies in the fact that love is creative and contagious. Of all the little songs which Tennyson uses as interludes in his "Princess," the "Bugle Song" is artistically the most attractive and morally the most significant. There is perfect correspondence between the sound and the sense.

"The splendor falls on castle walls
And snowy summits old in story :

THE LEGEND OF THE CHRISTMAS ROSE

The long light shakes across the lakes,
And the wild cataract leaps in glory.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
Blow, bugle ; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

“O hark, O hear ! how thin and clear,
And thinner, clearer, farther going !
O sweet and far from cliff and scar
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing !
Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying :
Blow, bugle ; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

“O love, they die in yon rich sky,
They faint on hill or field or river :
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
And grow for ever and for ever.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.”

In contrast to the echoes of a bugle which grow fainter and fainter until they die out, the echoes of love forever roll from soul to soul, and grow with increasing volume. The supreme test of the work of every great artist is its infectious quality. The success of all art activity depends on the fact that the man who receives another man's expression of feeling is capable of experiencing the same emotion which moved the man who expressed it. Judged by this standard, Jesus is the supreme artist of history.

He has infected more men with a new and great emotion than anyone else has. The success of His work for the world depends on the fact that this emotion has been contagious; that echoes of the new affection have echoed from one infected soul to another through all the weary years since the first Christmas morn.

Every true friend of the Babe of Bethlehem who has blown this sweetest of bugle songs into the glens and valleys of human life, has never failed to hear its re-echoes. Does not history show it to be contagious? Does not the law of love always triumph when it is tried? The wise old myth of "Beauty and the Beast," which exists in so many different forms because dear to human hearts, is the dramatic statement of the eternal truth that the way to make anything beautiful is to love it in spite of its ugliness. It was the love of a beautiful woman that transformed the ugly Beast into a handsome young prince, and the thing into which she transformed him was beautiful because beauty is love's sign and symbol. The English humorist Jerome K. Jerome, in his story, "The Passing of the Third Floor Back," shows with dramatic power how the shabby lives in a shabby London boarding house were created anew into true men and women through the idealizing love of

the strange young man, who was an angel in disguise. This is the old story in a new dress. It is not an idle dream, but a dream daily fulfilled.

Christian love is the final philosophy of life. Christian love at the Christmas season girdles the world with golden chains. Christmas occupies its unique and dominant place in human thought because of a deep-seated conviction that love alone is able to create the world anew, and direct its activities to noble ends. All other agencies, law and punishment and force, have been tried on a large scale in human history, and found wanting. The sufficient argument against their use is not that it is wrong to use them, because the man who thinks that love has no anger in it does not know what love means. But the sufficient argument against the use of force is its general futility.

Force is not a remedy but an aggravation. The all-sufficient argument in favor of the use of love, as a transforming agency, is its efficiency. Judge Lindsey has demonstrated the truth of this statement so completely as to convince any man who has any respect for facts. His experience with Lee Martin and his "River Front Gang" is such a demonstration, and it is

only one out of many. Lee Martin was a boy burglar, a sneak-thief, a pickpocket, a jail breaker, and a tramp. His gang was known to the newspapers as the most desperate band of young criminals in Denver. Lee Martin and another member of the gang were caught one night in a drug store into which they had broken. When the Judge found them in jail, they were strapped to the benches of their cells and were badly bruised after their interview with the police, who punished them for refusing to "snitch," that is, to tell on the fellow-members of their gang. The Judge told them he wanted to help them. They sneered at him. They had been so long at war with society that it was only after a month of frequent visits and the use of infinite tact and sympathy, that they could be induced to believe that anybody wished to help them. They had become such desperate young criminals that it seemed almost too late to begin any work of reformation.

The police captain assured the Judge that it was too late. "You can't 'baby' Lee Martin," he said. "He's been in jail thirteen times and it hasn't done him any good." The captain spoke better than he knew. He was quite right as to the facts, but he was wrong in his implied assumption that nothing else could do him any

good, because nothing else had ever been tried.

"Well," said the Judge, "I'd like to see what we can do. If we fail we'll still have twelve times the best of the jail. It has cost this city, in officers' fees alone, over a thousand dollars to make a criminal of him. Let us see how much it will cost to turn him into an honest boy." The officer reeled off a long list of Martin's offences, and the Judge retorted with a type-written record of them twice as long.

"How in the world did you get 'em, Judge?" asked the astonished officer. "*We* couldn't *sweat* 'em out of him."

The case was finally referred to the Judge's court. Martin was tried and his guilt was clear. He was sent back to jail under suspended sentence, while the Judge thought out his plan of procedure. One night he brought Martin to his chambers under guard. After a little he sent the guard away. Then he decided to put the influence of love to the test. "I told him," said the Judge, "of the fight I was making for him, showed him how I had been spending all my spare time trying to straighten things out, and warned him that the police did not believe I could succeed. 'Now, Lee,' I said, 'you can run away if you want to, and prove me a liar to the cops, but I want to help you and

I want you to stand by me. I want you to trust me and I want you to go back to the jail there and let me do the best I can.’”

He went, and he went alone—unguarded. Then he was put on probation and in a few days he brought to the Judge two other members of the gang, “Red” Mike and Tommie Green. The Judge told them also how he wanted to help them to live honest lives, and he praised Martin for his moral strength in going back to the jail alone. Before they left “Red” and Tommie had “snitched” on themselves and become probationers. One by one every member of the gang came, until all seven were on the Judge’s list, confessed wrong doers, pledged to give up crime and make an honest effort to be “straight.” To-day, six out of the seven are honest young workmen. The use of force tried thirteen times and failed. The creative power of love tried once, and triumphed! Judge Lindsey demonstrated the truth of the maxim uttered by a prisoner-philosopher of the Federal prison at Atlanta, Ga., that “if you cannot reform a man by treating him like a man it is pretty certain you cannot reform him by treating him like a dog.”

The strength of love as a working method is its efficiency. There is one power, and one

alone, strong enough to heal the hurt of the world. It is the creative power of a new affection. The man who acquires love as a habit, and as a settled attitude to life, is the most efficient man. We do not fight fire with fire. We fight fire with water. We cannot heal the world's hurt by using the agencies that produced the hurt. We may raise an ice-bound window-sash by the use of a hatchet and a strong arm, but we do damage to the wood in the process. The use of a little hot water is much less dramatic, but much more efficient. In the land-tax contest Lloyd-George goes up and down England uttering one sentence, "Shall ten thousand people own all the soil of England and all others be trespassers in the land of their birth?" And this one sentence does more to destroy the citadels of selfishness and prejudice than all the battering rams ever used against England's ancient walled towns. There is no power as strong as an idea, and there is no idea as strong as love.

All other forces in human life are destructive, disintegrating and divisive. Love alone is creative, constructive and cooperative. In Dante's beatific vision he said the Eternal Light illuminated many things for him, and the chief thing among them all was this:

ROSES THAT BLOOM AT CHRISTMAS

“I saw that in its depth far down is lying
Bound up with love together in one volume,
What through the world in leaves is scattered.”

The isolating activities of men are like leaves scattered through the world by the wind. What gathers them together into one volume is love. Love gives them worth, meaning, coherence, efficiency. The first and chief and oft-repeated Christmas greeting of the Babe of Bethlehem to our world, therefore, may be summed up in these words:

“There is no good of life but love—but love!
What else looks good, is some shade flung from love;
Love gilds it, gives it worth. Be warned by me,
Never you cheat yourself one instant! Love.
Give love, ask only love, and leave the rest!”

A child’s tears, a guardian angel, and winter roses; the tears standing for the sorrow and injustice and loneliness of life; the guardian angel representing the creative power of the new affection born on the first Christmas; the roses symbolizing a transformed and beautified and compassionate world, this is the meaning of the Legend of the Christmas Rose.

THE VIRGIN'S DREAM

FROM A PAINTING BY ALFRED BRAMTOT

This picture was first exhibited at the Salon, Paris, in 1890, and was immediately purchased by the Musée de Mulhouse (Alsace) where it now is. The reproduction is from a photograph by Braun Clement & Co., Paris and New York, and is reproduced by their kind permission.

“At last Thou art come, little Saviour !
And Thine angels fill midnight with song ;
Thou art come to us, gentle Creator !
Whom Thy creatures have sighed for so long.

“Thou art come to the beautiful Mother ;
She hath looked on Thy marvelous face ;
Thou art come to us, Maker of Mary !
And she was Thy channel of grace.

“We have waited so long for Thee, Saviour !
Art Thou come to us, dearest, at last ?
Oh, bless Thee, dear Joy of Thy Mother !
This is worth all the wearisome past !

“Thou art come, Thou art come, Child of Mary !
Yet we hardly believe Thou art come ;
It seems such a wonder to have Thee,
New Brother ! with us in our home !”

—*Frederic W. Faber.*



THE VIRGIN'S DREAM
BY ALFRED BRAMTOT

INTERPRETATION—THE ANTICIPATION OF CHRISTMAS

“I can only admire what is already in my soul. If I shed tears over a picture of love, it is because it appeals to an old experience. Love cannot be painted; only its manifestations can be painted. If the feeling is not previously within, the manifestation will not put it there. The portrait of Jesus is no exception. There are some in the gallery who have appreciated it from the very outset. They could only do so on the principle that Christmas light is older than Christmas Day. Had the portrait of Jesus been foreign to the world, the world would never have accepted it.”

—*George Matheson.*

THE ANTICIPATION OF CHRISTMAS

W^HATEVER else they may or may not be, the stories that cluster around the birth of Jesus are matchless, idyllic poetry; stories that have been retold in music, and drama and painting, as no other stories have ever been; stories that appeal to men, with a perennial freshness, as if they were a new creation each year, like the flowers of every spring time; stories that have in them a charm like the simple charm of the sunshine; a charm, therefore, which is equally felt by both the child and the man.

The songs and stories that gather about the birth-record of Jesus have in them the same primitive elements that are embodied in the folk-stories which lie so close to the heart of mankind, not only in its childhood, but in its maturity as well. They embody needs so universally felt, that these needs have found expression in secular as well as in sacred literature. The song, for example, which the

mother of Jesus sang before his birth, and the children's fairy story, "Cinderella," are both tuned to the same key and express the same hope. They both alike anticipate the day when the proud shall be put down and the lowly shall be exalted, and all unjust sufferers shall come to their own. Mary's Magnificat contains a revolutionary doctrine and expresses the hope for a reversal of human values, and for the revival of a new standard of greatness. The burden of Mary's song still remains a supreme need both of individuals and of nations. King Robert of Sicily recognized the revolutionary ring in Mary's song and thought it was well that the Magnificat should be sung only in Latin so that its real meaning might be concealed.

The secret of the persistent popularity of these stories does not lie, however, in their loveliness alone. Their secret does not lie even in the hope they express for a reversal of values and for the day to come when that which men call great shall be called little, much as this result would mean for social welfare and moral sanity. The secret lies rather in the universal truth which they embody; it lies in the longing of men for the divine to come in concrete form to the human. This is the golden thread that

runs through them all and gives to them a meaning. Men like Simeon and women like Anna waiting in Jerusalem "for the dayspring from on high," represented the desire of many thousand of their fellow countrymen. The annunciation to Mary was the word that many a Jewish maiden had hoped to hear. The angel music in the starry sky answered the heart music of the honest shepherds.

This anticipation of the Christ-Child was not confined within the nation to which He belonged. Granted that the finding of the researches of the astronomer, Kepler, is true, and that in the year of Christ's birth a bright star appeared between Jupiter and Saturn, why was it that the Magi connected this star with the birth of a child? They could have done so only on the ground that there prevailed in the East a widespread hope and desire for a divine manifestation.

The necessary assumption, therefore, back of the story of the Wise Men is a fact of history. Confucius in China prophesied the coming of a Messiah, and it is a most noteworthy fact that a company of his followers went forth in search of such a Messiah and as a result of this search Buddhism was introduced into China. Zoroaster in Persia foretold the coming of a

prophet, born of a virgin, who should found a new kingdom. Certain passages in Virgil are so remarkable that they have been considered to be Messianic prophecies. The cry of the human for the divine is a cry common to all religions.

Lydia Maria Child has written a little book called "The Aspirations of Humanity," in which she seeks to show that the religious aspirations of men are everywhere and always the same. To whatever extent this may be true, it is apparent that the annunciation to Mary foretold an event which was anticipated and universally desired. It is for this reason that it has been so frequently painted. Painters have treated the Annunciation in two ways, it is treated as an event and also as a mystery. As an event, painters represent the simple fact of a beautiful child coming into human life to change and to bless it. As a mystery, they represent the abstract truth of the incarnation of the divine. Bramtot's picture happily combines both ideas. It embodies the sublime truth that the divine came into human life and came as a human child. This fact constitutes the heart of Christmas.

It adds sweet reasonableness to the Christmas story to remember that it was not unex-

pected, but stands related to the revelation made long before to the heart of man. A story to be true does not need to be unique. Certain it is that, if there had been no felt need and longing for the divine, "the Son of the Highest" would never have been recognized when He came. Men see only what they are prepared to see. "I have not found in my experience," said George William Curtis, "that travelers always bring back with them the sunshine of Italy or the elegance of Greece, so that I begin to suspect a man must have Italy and Greece in his heart, if he would ever see them with his eyes."

The Babe of Bethlehem was recognized as the "Son of the Highest," in the only way He could have been or ever can be recognized. He was recognized as such because certain men were prepared by their anticipation of Him to see Him when He came. It is like this. In the realm of spiritual vision the same principle operates which Walter Rauschenbusch illustrates from the experience of the botanist and the childless man. A man was walking through the woods in springtime. The air was thrilling and throbbing with the passion of little hearts, with the love-wooing, the parent pride, and the deadly fear of the birds. But the

man never noticed that there was a bird in the woods. He was a botanist and was looking for plants. A man was walking through the streets of a city, pondering the problems of wealth and national well-being. He saw a child sitting on the curbstone and crying. He met children at play. He saw a young mother with her child and an old man with his grandchild. But it never occurred to him that little children are the foundation of society, a chief motive power in economic effort, the most influential teachers, the source of the purest pleasures, the embodiment of form and color and grace. The man had never had a child and his eyes were not opened. We see only what we are prepared by anticipation to see. If we would ever see Italy and Greece with our eyes, we must first have them in our hearts.

Of course the bird's instinct for it does not prove the existence of the warm Southland, but may it not be that the existence of the Southland accounts for the instinct in the bird? May it not be that God brooded the desire for Himself in man's heart, because He wanted to satisfy it? Consciously or unconsciously the desire for the divine has been mankind's lode-star, as Browning said it was for himself.

“I have always had one lode-star; now
As I look back, I see that I have halted
Or hastened as I looked toward that star—
A need, a trust, a yearning after God.”

This desire for the divine was as deep as the need for it was sadly felt. Long had the Athenians worshiped at the altar of the Unknown God. Times without number the inscription had been read in an Egyptian temple —“I am she that was and is and shall be, and no one has ever drawn aside my veil.” How profound and practical was the need is seen in the fact that temples were desecrated by certain vices which had been already banished from society. Plato forbade intemperance except in the feast of Bacchus. Aristotle permitted lewd images only of the gods. “It is difficult,” said Pliny, “to say whether it might not be better for men to have no religion at all than to have such a religion as ours.”

Plato, in the *Phaedo*, makes Simias express the desire which grew out of this need: “I think with Socrates,” he says, “and I dare say you think so, too, that we must lay hold of the best human opinion, in order that, borne by it as on a raft, we may sail over the dangerous sea of life; unless we can find a stronger boat or

some sure word of God which will more surely and safely carry us.” What the Christmas festival celebrates is the belief that the Babe of Bethlehem is the “sure word,” which Socrates and the whole world so deeply needed and desired.

The religion of the Christ-Child does not differ from other religions because it claims to have created the desire for the divine, but because it satisfies it. Tertullian beautifully says that the human soul is naturally Christian. He means that the answer which the soul’s need had anticipated was exactly the answer which the Christ-Child furnished. The salutation and Christmas greeting which the Christ-Child, through the angel choir, brought to the world was the salutation used for ages by the men who had most anticipated His coming. This salutation was, “Shalom,” “peace.”

The common salutation of every nation is characteristic of its own habit of thought. When two Germans meet they say, “How do you find yourself?” It is introspective. When two Frenchmen meet, they say, “How do you have yourself?” How do you appear to the world? It is artistic. When two Americans meet they say, “How do you do?” It is practical and strenuous. It grows out of a life of

busy activity, and the asker of the question is so busy that he does not wait for an answer. When two Greeks meet, they say, "Chaire"—"rejoice." It embodies the Greek enjoyment of life and his desire for pleasure. But the best of all salutations is that used by the Hebrews—"Shalom." Their whole past history is reflected in the word. Surrounded as they were by warring tribes of nomads, and subject as they were to raids upon their homes and property, they expressed the daily desire of their hearts when they greeted each other with the salutation—"Peace." This is the Christ-Child's salutation to mankind.

The Christmas festival is the celebration of the fact that the Christ-Child brought peace to men because He is the answer to the heart's deepest desire. "The day spring from on high shall visit us to guide our feet into the way of peace." It is a happy circumstance that Christmas is celebrated when the year is reborn; when the shortest day and the longest night have passed. Just as the lengthened day symbols the coming of spring, so Christmas is the birthday of hope for the world.

At one point in the story Luke reports that the disciples "disbelieved for joy." To them the glad tidings seemed too good to be true.

The Christmas story seems too good to be true and too important to be easily accepted. The story's sublime announcement that Nature's God entered into a simple peasant life and became one of us, "pitched His tent with us," as John expresses it, in order to tell us who and what He was, produces one of two very opposite effects. It must either stagger men into unbelief or surprise them into a new strange life. If it produces neither result, the story has been read to little purpose. If the Christmas story is *not* true, what a pathetic disappointment it has been! It doubtless still could be sung as a thing of beauty, but it would always have to be sung in the minor key as a beautiful but idle dream.

As the Jew of old, surrounded by daily dangers, cried out for "peace," so man seems like a ship-wrecked sailor cast upon an inhospitable shore, surrounded by dangers without and dangers within, only able to survive a few brief troubled years, condemned to live the lonely life of a solitary, coming from he knows not where, going he knows not whither. How could he help crying out for some "sure word" on which he could embark as on a raft, some word that would put into his hands a key to life's true meaning, and into his heart a knowledge of

life's real goal? Has not this always been the cry of his heart? But if there is no such "sure word" or meaning or goal—if the Christmas story is not true—then it is too sad to talk about. Better to ask no question than to ask and receive no answer. Oh, that the Christmas story might be true! And the human heart believes it is. Man's need *requires* it to be true. It is not too good to be true, it is true because it is too good not to be true. For these many centuries man's poor lonely heart has been rejoicing not over a fiction but over a fact.

Believing as he does that the Christmas story is true, what wonder that the angels sang their overture in the clear Syrian sky at the Christ-Child's birth! What wonder that the group around His cradle thought that "the dawn of a new day stood tip-toe on the mountain top"! What wonder that His birthday has become the second birthday of mankind! What wonder that, at Christmas, in the hearts of millions of men, two worlds meet and kiss! What wonder that men rejoice to feel that they have arrived at their inn and need travel, footsore and weary, no further! This is the heart of the Christmas story. The origin and meaning of Christmas is the belief and hope that the an-

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ticipation of it has been realized and the desire for it gratified. To the wistful hearts of men and women the fulness of the Christmas spirit comes only when they discover for themselves that the realization has replaced the anticipation of it.

III

THE ARRIVAL OF THE SHEPHERDS

FROM A PAINTING BY HENRI LEROLLE

*The original of this picture is in the Museum of
Carcassonne, France.*

“We sate among the stalls at Bethlehem;
The dumb kine, from their fodder turning them,
 Softened their horned faces
 To almost human gazes
 Toward the newly Born:
The simple shepherds from the star-lit brooks
 Brought visionary looks.

“God knows that I am feeble like the rest!
I often wandered forth more child than maiden,
Among the midnight hills of Galilee
 Whose summits looked heaven-laden,
Listening to silence as it seemed to be
God’s voice, so soft yet strong.

“Then I knelt down most silent like the night,
 Too self-renounced for fears,
Raising my small face to the boundless blue
 Whose stars did mix and tremble in my tears;
God heard *them* falling after, with his dew.”

—*Mrs. Browning.*



THE ARRIVAL OF THE SHEPHERDS
BY HENRI LEROLLE

INTERPRETATION—THE LONELI- NESS OF CHRISTMAS

“O CHRISTMAS! Merry Christmas!
Is it really come again,
With its memories and greetings,
With its joy and with its pain?
There's a minor in the carol,
And a shadow in the light,
And a spray of cypress twining
With the holly wreath tonight.
And the hush is never broken
By laughter, light and low,
As we listen in the starlight
To the ‘bells across the snow.’”

“O Christmas, merry Christmas!
‘Tis not so very long
Since other voices blended
With the carol and the song!
If we could but hear them singing
As they are singing now,
If we could but see the radiance
Of the crown on each dear brow,
There would be no sigh to smother,
No hidden tear to flow,
As we listen in the starlight
To the ‘bells across the snow.’”

—Frances Ridley Havergal.

THE LONELINESS OF CHRISTMAS

NEINE o'clock on Christmas eve! Nine o'clock on Christmas night! How different the feelings for which these hours stand! Christmas eve marks the hour of high hope and anticipation. Christmas night marks the hour of a strange unnamable longing and loneliness. It is not because Christmas day failed to bring its charm of peace and its enchantment of good-will. It is not because our friends did not inspire our hearts with humble gratitude by their tokens of love. They did. But with all the joy of its spirit and with all its gifts of tenderness, there still remains a void which Christmas day has not filled. Of all the nights of the year, is it not on Christmas night that men are most conscious of that void?

The Christmastide has its pathetic side. It is the best of times to many, but the worst of times to some. It is the most trying of all seasons to lonely folks. It makes vivid the memory of joys which are theirs no more. The empty chair by the fireside it makes more

noticeable. Its very abundance of joy makes the sorrows of the lonely more keenly felt. It makes real the truth of Tennyson's statement, "a sorrow's crown of sorrows is remembering happier things."

The first Christmas itself was typical of all the Christmases that have succeeded it, because it was not unaccompanied by a deep sense of loneliness. As the two fugitives from Nazareth drew near to Bethlehem on the first Christmas night, they were too anxious and confused to recall the many events in Bethlehem's history which had made the little village already memorable. They probably did not remember that here David was born; here he watched his father's flocks; here he was crowned king; here his three officers broke through the Philistine host to bring their king a cup of water from the well of his childhood.

There were, however, two events which must have forced themselves on the strangers' attention, because they harmonized so well with the dominant feelings in Mary's heart. On the way to the town, Mary passed the tomb where Jacob buried his much-loved Rachel. And, as Mary, whose hour had come, looked on this pathetic memorial of a man's love and a woman's travail and untimely death, a natural pre-

sentiment must have filled her heart with fear and apprehension. But in Mary's heart there was faith as well as fear, for it is the chief note in her character. The fact about Mary on which the historian mostly dwells is her faith, a faith more sorely tried than that of any other woman. On the first Christmas night her faith must have fed on the memory of Ruth, the Moabitess, who in the valleys near by had "gleaned for grain and harvested a husband"; of Ruth, Mary's own distant kinswoman, who was driven into Bethlehem by calamity and misfortune "to find herself the unexpected mother of a race of kings." This same hope also nestled in Mary's heart.

Mary's hope, however, was destined soon to be rudely shocked. At the end of a journey that had been full of sadness and alarm, she stood among strangers, lonely and confused. No one offered a refuge to the weary, suffering woman. It was not because "the fine traditional hospitality of the Jew had failed, but because every house was thronged by exiles like herself." Silent and thoughtful, Mary went to a round cave hewn in the limestone rock and used as a stable. In such a place as this was born her child, the Child who came to bring glad tidings to the lonely. She took

a manger for her child's crib in lieu of a cradle. It has been said that no woman comes to herself until she loves, and no woman knows how to love until her first-born is in her arms. This supreme joy of womanhood Mary experienced in the meanest and loneliest of surroundings. Lerolle's picture, "The Arrival of the Shepherds," is an accurate representation of the cave at Bethlehem.

Mrs. Browning, in her poem, "The Virgin Mary to the Child Jesus," has given vivid expression to the thoughts which must have filled Mary's heart on the night when shepherds saw strange and beautiful things in the Syrian sky, but of which Mary herself saw nothing. The cave in which Jesus was born has since been surrounded with a halo of glory and romance, and on its site stands the beautiful Basilica, the oldest monument to Christ existing in the world, built by Saint Helena. But on the first Christmas night it was a scene of pain, poverty and loneliness.

During that night Mary must often have asked herself the question, "Is it thus that kings are born?" Between the sweet dream that stirred her heart with rapture a few months before and this grim reality in Bethlehem's cave, what a contrast! No one can look at

Lerolle's picture without feeling what must have been in Mary's mind. The picture is valuable chiefly because it is suggestive of this contrast. The contrast which gave to Mary many heart-ponderings the night her Child was born, was destined to grow more and more marked in her Son's later life. Her Child's coming was announced with song and expectant joy. His life went out in silence and apparent defeat. It was ushered in by the radiant light of a guiding star; it went out in a darkness which the historian thought covered the whole earth. Before His birth, Mary sang her Magnificat of quiet joy; at His death an arrow pierced through her heart. At His crib Wise Men gathered to worship and shepherds came to praise; at His death His friends forsook Him and fled. His life began in the company of kings; it ended in the company of criminals. It is the contrast between the expectation and the apparent lack of fulfilment which caused Mary's loneliness in Bethlehem and throughout her life.

Is not the cause of Mary's loneliness the cause of loneliness everywhere? Does not the real pathos and loneliness of life lie in the contrast between the illimitable thirst and the unsatisfied draught, between the flying ideal and

the lagging real? Loneliness is especially felt at Christmas because Christmas makes more apparent this contrast. There comes at the close of Christmas Day to almost every man a nameless feeling of regret. It is because Christmastide affects one as music does. It awakens memories of his childhood, of the old home, of dear companions now lost awhile, of early hopes and ambitions not yet realized; it makes him aware of desires and longings for a world, not as it now is, but as he would like it to be.

If this is the cause of the Christmas mood of loneliness, then the comfort for it does not lie far away. The comfort is the discovery which the loneliness itself compels one to make; the discovery that one's heart is too large for this world, and that the heart's deepest need is a knowledge of the Great Companion. Although Mary did not see what the shepherds on the hillside saw, and was not led as were the Magians in the Far East, yet the one star that shone in her maiden heart and made her a heroine among the women of the world, was her virgin faith in the Great Companion. She had discovered the one refuge from all loneliness.

It is like this: A "Nixie" clerk in the Post

THE LONELINESS OF CHRISTMAS

Office is one who handles all mail with insufficient or illegible addresses. All letters addressed to Santa Claus, therefore, come to his department. In one of our large cities on a certain Christmas eve a Nixie clerk worked late at his desk. He was sad and lonely because the shadow of a great sorrow rested over him. When the messenger handed him the last few nixies, he took up the first, a tiny crumpled envelope, and found a note attached to it by the carrier, reading—"This was given me by a little girl at No. 302 Walnut Street." The clerk's blood tingled, for that was his own home, and now he noticed his own little girl's cramped writing. Although the letter was addressed to "Santa Claus, North Pole," he felt he had a right to open it, for in this case he was Santa Claus' partner. When he opened it this is what he read:

"Dear Santa Claus: We are very sad at our home this year, and I don't want you to bring me anything. Little Charlie, my brother, went up to heaven last week, and all I want you to do when you come to my house is to take his toys to him. I will leave them in the corner by the chimney, his hobby-horse, and train, and everything. He will be lost up in

heaven without them, especially his horse. He always enjoyed riding it so much. So you must take them to him, and you needn't mind leaving anything for me. If you could give papa something that would make him stop crying all the time, it would be the best you could do for me. I heard him tell mamma that 'only eternity could cure him.' Could you give him some of that? Be sure to take the things to Charlie, and I will be your good little girl.

"Marian."

Whether Santa Claus had any "eternity" to give away to this father is not told, but the request which his little girl made is the most fitting request to be made of Santa Claus by lonely children of all ages; and that means all of us.

The natural prayer of all such lonely hearts is the one uttered by the blind poet-preacher, Matheson, "My heart needs Thee, O Lord. No part of my being needs Thee like my heart. All else within me can be filled by Thy gifts. My hunger can be satisfied by daily bread. My thirst can be allayed by earthly waters. My cold can be removed by household fires. My weariness can be relieved by outward rest. But this world has not provided for my

heart. It has provided for my eye; it has provided for my ear; it has provided for my touch; it has provided for my taste; it has provided for my sense of beauty,—but it has not provided for my heart. Provide Thou for my heart. Be Thou its covert in the storm, its star in the night, its voice in the solitude! Keep it under the shadow of Thine own wings!"

Whenever loneliness understands thus the cause that produces it and utters the language of such a cry, it reveals to man his own greatness. He then discovers that loneliness is the price he pays for immortality. If eternity did not nestle in his heart he would be satisfied as he is. "All men feel lonely in proportion as they are sensitive and noble." Every true man feels that he is born in exile, and the mood of loneliness comes to him at Christmas because he is homesick for a world where the Christmas spirit shall come fully into play. Christmas Day would not disappoint had he not dreamed of a better. He had dreamed of a beatific vision. He had dreamed of an unclouded moment of supreme happiness. He had come to think that his unsatisfied hunger for joy would on one day at least be appeased. Then he discovered, when the day was done, that his experience was like that of all the seers and poets

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of the past. They, too, had dreamed of a beatific vision and tried to grasp it, but it always eluded them.

Moses, in the supreme hour of his life, the hour of his great renunciation, asked that he might have a complete beatific vision; he called it the glory of God. He was told that he could see God's back but not His face. Only a partial vision was possible,—he saw only the train of its robe. Faust's life goes out after he had experienced one moment of bliss, the hour when he felt that at last his will was in harmony with God's. It seems a small reward for a long life of effort, but Goethe knew life when he gave Faust only a glimpse of beatitude. Abt Vogler, in Browning's poem, only once in all his musical career has the rapture of one creative moment of supreme satisfaction and then it flees and will not be caught again for all his effort. Dante, in his "Paradiso," perhaps more than any other, has attempted to describe the nature of the beatific vision. "It is like this," he says, and then describes it in terms of light. And when he is done he says, "No, it is not that; it is like this." Then he describes it in terms of music. And when he is done, again he says, "No, it is not that; it is like this," and he describes it in terms of motion. When he

has finished, however, he discovers that he has not described it after all, for it cannot be told.

The beatific vision could be grasped and described if it were not for one thing.—It is too large. It is its greatness which baffles description. Is there any who would wish it to be made smaller? Certainly not the lonely folks. They, least of all, for loneliness has itself enlarged their hearts and increased their hunger for a beatitude, which eye hath not seen nor ear heard. It is this never satisfied desire for the beatific vision which makes life bearable and makes it great. Life cannot be great without being also lonely. This is the secret cause of the spirit of loneliness which makes its visit on Christmas night.

Man's loneliness is man's birthmark; designed to remind him of the heart's true fatherland to which he journeys; designed to remind him that nightly he ought to pitch his moving tent a day's march nearer home. Man's loneliness is the thorn which accompanies the rose. Once let a man discover the real cause for his mood of loneliness, and he will not complain because God puts thorns with roses, but will thank Him because He puts roses with thorns.

THE EVENING HYMN TO THE VIRGIN

FROM A PAINTING BY WILLIAM A. BOUGUEREAU

The original of this picture is owned by Mr. John Wanamaker, and is in his private collection in Philadelphia. It is here reproduced by his kind permission.

“ ‘What means this glory round our feet,’
The Magi mused, ‘more bright than morn?’
And voices chanted clear and sweet,
‘Today the Prince of Peace is born!’

“ ‘What means that star,’ the shepherds said,
‘That brightens through the rocky glen?’
And angels, answering overhead,
Sang, ‘Peace on earth, good will to men!’

“And they who do their souls no wrong,
But keep at eve the faith of morn,
Shall daily hear the angel-song,
‘Today the Prince of Peace is born!’”

—*James Russell Lowell.*



THE EVENING HYMN TO THE VIRGIN
BY WILLIAM A. BOUGUEREAU

INTERPRETATION—THE MUSIC OF THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

“There are songs which can only be learned in the valley, no art can teach them; no rules of voice can make them perfectly sung. Their music is in the heart. They are songs of memory, of personal experience. And so, my soul, thou art receiving a music lesson from thy Father. Thou art being educated for the choir invisible. There are parts of the symphony that none can take but thee. There are chords too minor for the angels. There may be heights in the symphony which are beyond thy scale—heights which the angels alone can reach. But there are depths which belong to thee and can only be touched by thee. Thy Father is training thee for the part the angels cannot sing: and the school is sorrow. Despise not thy school of sorrow, O my soul; it will give thee a unique part in the universal song.”

—*George Matheson.*

THE MUSIC OF THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

ALMOST all the characters in the story of the first Christmas talk poetry as if it were their natural element. Every reader of Luke's account of it is impressed by this outstanding feature of the story. When Mary courageously journeys to the hill country to visit Elisabeth, and Elisabeth offers her salutation, she expresses it in a hymn of benediction. Mary's answer to it is her famous Magnificat, her first song, and also the swan-song of her life. At the birth of John, Zacharias sings a hymn of praise and prophecy. The angel who notifies the shepherds of the birth at Bethlehem cannot deliver his message without putting it into poetic form. The overture of angels in the clear Syrian sky is in Hebrew verse. When the mysterious Child is brought to the Temple, the aged Simeon chants his "Nunc dimittis."

These are the matin songs of Christianity. Bouguereau's picture, therefore, represents

one of the chief features of the Christmas story. The one thing which the picture says is that the coming of the Christ-Child set hearts and tongues a-singing and stirred emotions which could be expressed only by music.

What was there in the Christmas story that made music the fitting accompaniment of the coming of the Christ-Child? What was the element in it that could not be told in prose, but demanded a musical form? What is it that makes music and Christianity so much akin? Of all the arts music owes most to Christianity, and of all the arts music is most congenial to its soul.

“See deep enough and you see musically,” said Thomas Carlyle. All deep things are melodious. What is the deep and fundamental fact in the first Christmas story which made prose inadequate to its telling? It is a wise saying of Aristotle that “Poetry is more serious and more philosophical than History.” History is the ordered record of facts. Poetry is the embodiment of the inner meaning of those facts. A fact is never fully known till its inner meaning is known. The writers of the first Christmas story use poetry, because it is their purpose to tell not the mere facts, but their inner meaning. What is the inner meaning

of these facts which poetry alone can express?

At first thought one supposes that he explains the affinity between music and the Christmas story by saying that it is because music is the expression of joy, and therefore it was naturally employed to celebrate the coming of the Christ-Child, whose mission it was to bring peace and joy and good will to men. He soon discovers, however, that this is not an adequate explanation, because music is used to express sadness as well as joy. No art is more suitable for the expression of sorrow than is music. Indeed, a tendency to sadness seems inherent in music. The experience of Jessica may be said to be typical, when she confessed, "I am never merry when I hear sweet music."

In point of fact, music is the chosen art of pessimism, as well as the chosen art of Christianity. Some of the best things ever said of the power and function of music have been said by the pessimistic Schopenhauer. Pessimism, as a religion, assigns a supreme place to music. It has produced a great master of musical art, Richard Wagner, and has discovered in his music the best illustration of the secret sympathy between the soul of music and its own. Any explanation, therefore, of the congenial

relation between music and Christianity must be one which will at the same time explain the same relation between music and sorrow.

For the universal use of music both before and after the first Christmas, one must search for a deeper cause than that music is the expression of joy. The sufficient explanation is to be found in the needed and beautiful service which music, in common with all other arts, renders to man,—to the man who is a Christian, and the man who is not. The real service which music renders lies in the fact that it furnishes a means of escape from an imperfect and discordant world into a world of beauty and harmony which man has created out of music as a retreat and sanctuary for his spirit. He is led to seek such a retreat because life, as he knows it, seems confused, ill-adjusted, and meaningless. He is perplexed by his experience. He is bewildered by such facts as famine, accident, disease, the death of dear ones, separation of friends, loneliness, doubt, sin, sorrow and folly. The burden and pressure of life weigh heavily upon any thinking man. The heart cries out for an explanation of a world which men find too big for them.

To man, thus confused and bewildered, art renders a supreme service. It creates and pre-

sents to his spirit a beauty, harmony, and perfection, which his soul craves. Art creates a world of its own, from which discords and imperfections are excluded. Daniel Gregory Mason, with clear insight, pointed out that the secret of art's power lies in its method of excluding what is discordant and irrelevant. If a tree violates the proportion of a landscape, the painter omits it from his composition. Raphael says, "We paint nature not as she is, but as she ought to be." In real life Pippa would be a poor mill-girl insulted by a thousand sordid and accidental details, but in Browning's poem she is a gentle, noble soul bringing goodness everywhere. The poet does not make her talk in character, and for good reason. Browning believed it was the poet's function to express for men and women, not what they ordinarily say, and what any one can hear them say any day, but to express for them the hidden sentiments and aspirations of the heart, which they cannot express for themselves. The poet sees men and women as God sees them. By this method art presents to man's vision a perfect ideal, which is suited to his soul's need.

Music, with its ninety fixed tones which are "pre-ordained to harmony," is of all arts the

most capable of expressing the desires and feelings of the heart. It is the most free of limitations. Unlike other arts, it does not represent external objects, but speaks directly to the soul. It uses only invisible sound waves. It is builded of breath alone. A piece of music lies cold and dead upon the page. It does not live until it is translated into sound. Then it dies upon the vibrating air and must be created anew each time we wish to hear it. Science cannot explain the mysterious connection between sound sensations and the emotions of the heart. But all are familiar with the extraordinary power of music to speak of love or joy or sorrow directly to the heart. Music is at once the most intangible and the most spiritual of the arts. It is the only art which cannot be prostituted to a bad use. "A maiden may sing of her lost love, but a miser cannot sing of his lost money." Music is the only art of earth which man is said to carry with him to use in Paradise.

"Music is a woman," says Wagner. It makes no appeal to the logical intellect, but speaks to the heart. It does not reason a man out of his distraction, but by the expulsive power of a new affection, it banishes the discords by introducing harmony to the emotions, and

THE MUSIC OF THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

to the troubled feelings it brings peace and rest. The sweet melancholy inspired by distant church bells on a calm summer evening in the country, and the invigorating effect of martial music on weary soldiers, are familiar illustrations of both the tonic and tranquillizing power of music. Wordsworth's poem, "The Power of Music," describes the magic results produced by an Oxford fiddler on passers-by and how through his music—

"The weary have life and the hungry have bliss,
The mourner is cheered and the anxious have rest,
And the guilt-burdened soul is no longer oppressed."

It is quite apparent why music and pessimism are congenial. To the pessimist music is a relief and escape from the discords and defects which pain and disturb him. "As when one rises in a balloon the earth seems fading away under him, and all its hard outlines change into a picture, so as we listen to great music, life grows transfigured; the weariness of years falls from us, and we renew our youth, our hope, our love."

For the same reason also, music and Christianity are congenial. There is a real point of contact between the Christian religion and

pessimism. Indeed, Christianity is not without an element of pessimism, if we use the word in its nobler sense. The Christian does not look on this world as perfect; far from it. He, too, longs for a better world than he finds this one to be. For him also, music expresses a desire for a harmony and beauty he now possesses only in part. The Christian, too, has discovered that this world pays no promise in full. It was for this very reason, chiefly, that the coming of the Christ-Child was accompanied with music. Men looked to Him as the harmonizer; looked to Him to lead their feet into the way of peace, and reconcile them to a world they could not understand.

There is this notable difference, however, between the music of the pessimist and that of the Christian. Music, to the pessimist, expresses only his desire for harmony. Music to the Christian expresses the same thing and in addition it expresses the joyous possession of a harmony already in his heart. One expresses a wish; the other celebrates a fact. To the Christian the wish has become a fact, because the Christ-Child has taught him how to make reconciliation with a world which only pains the pessimist. Tribulations, which cause only sorrow to some, are things in which Paul

glories because they put a new song in his heart; a song which can be learned only in the valley. It is the new song which the Babe of Bethlehem taught the world to sing, and the man who has learned how to sing it has made the conquest of life. John Keats' well-known admiration for the nightingale is founded upon the fact that this bird makes a practice of artificially stimulating its centers of voice-production by causing its breast to impinge upon a thorn. The use of the pain as a means of adding depth and richness to the music is a high achievement in bird or man.

To impinge one's heart on a thorn is painful, very painful, and there are some sorrows, in view of which any easy and ready explanation seems like an insult to thinking men. It was a supremely difficult task which the Babe of Bethlehem set Himself, to strew with flowers this world's open graves, to flood with sunshine this world's darkened rooms, to fill with music this world's wounded hearts. A hard task indeed, but He performed it. He gave no easy explanations; He did something better; He helped men to accomplish the apparently impossible; He taught sad hearts to sing when wounded by thorns. The glory of Christian music is that it is nightingale music. It is

sung in the shadows. It is sung not only in spite of pain, but sometimes because of it.

This is the note of joy and triumph in all Christian music. This accounts for the marvelous progress made by music as an art, since the Christ-Child came. If it had not been for the Christmas story, no such song could have been written or sung as Franz Abt's "Apostrophe to Tears." Music speaks a twofold language to the Christian. It expresses his desire for harmony and celebrates his joyous possession of it, because there exists already a music in his heart. "The melody of the heart," Paul calls it. "Unheard melodies," Keats calls it. This unsung harmony of the heart constituted the real music of the first Christmas. The evening hymn which the angels in Bouguereau's picture play to Mary, is only the symbol of a melody already in her heart, weary and lonely though she be.

The unheard melody of the heart is the distinctive and notable element of all Christian music, by virtue of which all heard melodies can be best appreciated. Raphael, in his picture of Saint Cecilia, the inventor of the organ and the patron saint of music, puts a broken organ in her hand, and introduces other musical instruments, which lie broken at her feet,

while she stands entranced by the sounds from a heavenly choir above her. By this the artist says that, when the unheard harmonies of heaven break upon the heart, all earthly music in comparison grows less and less attractive, even though one be a musical artist as Cecilia was.

The heart which is thus in tune with the Infinite, has the best of all music, the music of the first Christmas, a music that does not die in the vibrating air. The man who does his own soul no wrong, but keeps until the eve of his life the morning faith of his childhood can always hear and sing such music. Such a heart has in it a little room, with storied walls and painted windows, from which nightingales are heard to sing. Such a heart says, with Keats, "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter." To such the music of man's art speaks a deeper language, because it is answered by an echo in the heart. To hearts attuned to unheard melodies, all earthly music speaks a language like that of the birds' song to Mrs. Browning:

"Oh, the little birds sang east,
And the little birds sang west,
And I smiled to think God's Greatness
Flowed around our incompleteness,
Round our restlessness, His rest."

“THE ARRIVAL AT BETHLEHEM”

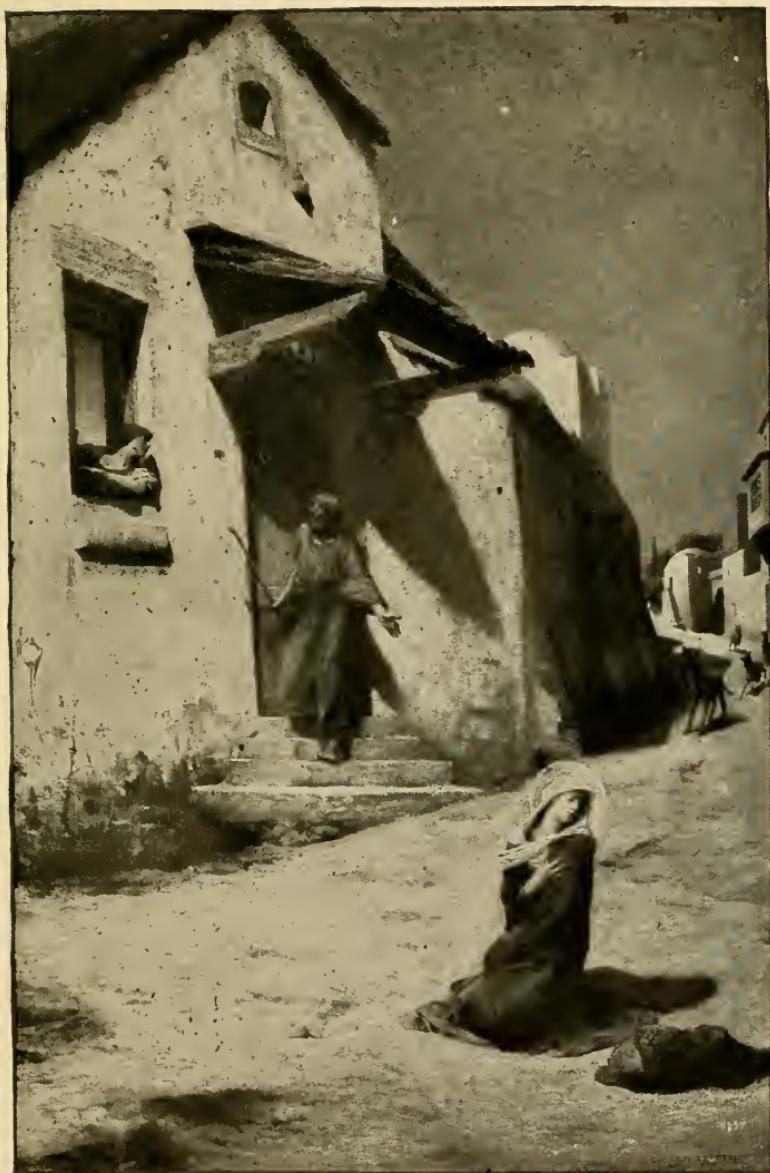
FROM A PAINTING BY LUC-OLIVIER MERSON

The original of this picture is now in the Museum of Mulhouse, Alsace-Lorraine. It was painted in 1884. Mr. Merson won the French Government's Rome Scholarship and in 1892 became a member of the Institute.

“O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep,
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee to-night.

“How silently, how silently,
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him still,
The dear Christ enters in.”

—*Phillips Brooks.*



THE ARRIVAL AT BETHLEHEM
BY LUC-OLIVIER MERSON

INTERPRETATION—MAKING ROOM
FOR CHRISTMAS

SONG OF HOPE

Children of yesterday, heirs of tomorrow,
What are you weaving? Labor and sorrow.
Look at your loom again; faster and faster
Fly the great shuttles prepared by the Master,
 There's life in the loom;
 Room for it!
 Room!

Children of yesterday, heirs of tomorrow,
Lighten your labor and sweeten your sorrow
Now while the shuttles fly faster and faster
Up be and at it, at work for the Master.
 He stands at the loom;
 Room for Him!
 Room!

Children of yesterday, heirs of tomorrow,
Look at your fabric of labor and sorrow,
Seamy and dark with despair and disaster,
Turn it and lo! the design of the Master.
 The Lord's at the loom,
 Room for Him!
 Room!

—*Mary A. Lathbury.*

MAKING ROOM FOR CHRISTMAS

AS a child looks on Christmas as the turning point in his calendar, so the nations count time from the first Christmas as if nothing which happened before was worth recording; as if the years before seemed like long rows of ciphers with no numeral preceding them to give them value; as if the world had begun all over again when Jesus was born in a stable. Every time men use the abbreviations, "A. D.," and write a date on their letter heads, they testify to the fact that Christ's coming was the turning point of history. Of course it is not true that events preceding the first Christmas are not worth recording, for Christ was in the world before Jesus slept his first sleep in Bethlehem's manger, but it is true that these events acquire worth in proportion as they are related to this central fact of history. They are like tidal rivers which flow to Him and the ebb of the tide bears back into these streams of events, a fulness of meaning borrowed from the central figure from which they ebb.

The true estimate of the value of the first Christmas for the world is strikingly revealed by those tidal rivers which flowed to the little Babe, and constituted the “fulness of the time” for His coming. While men found no room for Him in Bethlehem’s inn, room had been prepared for Him in the world’s history. Room was made for the Christ by three great tidal rivers—three events which made the speedy spread of the Christmas spirit possible. These events were the career of Alexander the Great, the rise of the Roman empire, and the dispersion of the Jews. The Jews and the Greeks and the Romans were the three deadly enemies of the new King, and yet the religion of the new time came from the Judean Capital, Jerusalem, the fountain head of the religious life of the world; it was preached in the tongue of Athens, the fountain head of the secular knowledge of the world; and it was spread by means of the Roman empire. The new faith spread with amazing rapidity only because of the unwilling service of its three greatest enemies.

The Jew was dispersed along the shores of the Mediterranean. He could be found in almost every known country, but he did not find a home in any. As the soil of his native land,

the deeds of his people and the graves of his fathers, draw the far off wanderer to the home of his childhood and fill the mountaineer in his exile with irrepressible longing, such was the Jewish exile's feeling for his Judean hills. These pilgrim Jews with their spiritual religion greatly helped to weaken an already decaying paganism. It had failed to satisfy spiritual needs. The priest no longer believed what he said. Two priests could not meet each other on the streets without laughing in each other's faces. Hence morality ceased to exist. For no nation has ever risen above its religion. Seneca said, "Crime is no more secret, but stalks before the eyes of men; innocence is not only rare, but does not exist at all." Virgil wrote his great poem to revive the spirit of the old religion and stop the ruin into which the religious life had crumbled, but in vain. It was too late. When the gospel of the new King began to make its appeal, it was to a world which had been made to feel its need, a need emphasized by the failure of the old religion; a need, the answer to which had already been indicated by the pilgrim Jew, who was God's specialist in religion.

The Roman empire furnished what the new religion needed if it was to become universal.

That Empire was wide spread. England herself was one of her outlying posts. She had one system of law and united all peoples under it. She allowed all conquered nations to enjoy the religion of their ancestors. She tolerated all religions. Christianity, therefore, had equal rights with all others. All that the new religion needed was a chance to be heard. Rome gave her that chance. In the forum at Rome Augustus placed a bronze column, and on it inscribed in gold letters the name and distance of every important city on the roads leaving Rome. It was called the "Golden Milestone." From it a military road was built to every province as soon as it was subdued. By relays of horses kept in fortified posts, couriers moved from the golden milestone to all important centers of the empire at the rate of a hundred miles a day. Unconsciously to herself, she was preparing a highway in the desert for the spread of the new religion. It was due partly to Rome's reign of law and her means of easy communication that an unusual and universal peace reigned when the child-King came:

"No war or battles' sound
Was heard the world around;
The idle spear and shield were high uphung;

The hooked chariot stood
Unstain'd with hostile blood;
The trumpet spake not to the armed throng,
And Kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sover'n Lord was by."

The Greek language was a tidal river whose importance it is hard to overestimate. The conquests of Alexander made it universal. He was a statesman, as well as a soldier. He founded colonies, and the Greek language and culture and civilization spread everywhere. Travel and commerce were as easy as they were at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Greek language occupied in those days the place that English occupies today. "At no other period of the world's history has so weighty a proportion of the human race been acquainted with a single language as was familiar with Greek when Paul began to preach." The first preachers of the new religion found ready made to their hands a language which had been prepared for them by the labor and study of three centuries. In it the New Testament was written. Into it the Old Testament had already been translated. "Athens laid the wires over which the word of God was flashed to the ends of the earth."

The Greek language alone was adequate to the needs of New Testament thought and without it Christianity could not, for centuries at least, have been preached to all nations. The fact that the superscription on the cross was in Hebrew and Greek and Latin is significant. It was a cosmopolitan world into which Jesus was born. Every historical event has its roots in the past and for this supreme historical event, there was such a preparation as befitted its importance.

The contrast between the reception which the preparation for Christ in history would lead one to expect He would receive and the reception which He actually did receive is a parable of the fact that the world's valuation of truth is not heaven's. The contrast between the room the little Babe occupied in a manger and the place He now holds in the world's history has in it the element of tragedy. It is these contrasts which have always given a pathetic interest to pictures of the manger scenes and caused men to linger over them with a feeling of tender regret.

So little did men appreciate at the time what manner of babe it was that was first cradled in the hay of Bethlehem's manger, that the very date of his birth was lost. No man

knows when Jesus was born. The chief reason for this neglect of Christ's birthday, as Henry van Dyke points out, was the fact that such a home and human scene as Christ's birth did not mean much to the early Christians, "for this world was a hard home for them." Indeed, they did not regard it as a home at all. They were persecuted and martyred alike by Jews and pagans. It was little benefit to them to be born. To die was their true escape and felicity. So it came to pass that they lived much in the heavenly future, despising the present life and celebrating the martyrs' death days as their true birthdays. Origen says, "No saint can be found who ever held a feast or banquet on his birthday or rejoiced when his son or daughter was born." Whatever the reason, all trace of the date of the nativity was lost. So slowly do men overtake God, that it was not till the latter half of the fourth century, when the church enjoyed imperial favor and when she saw that suffering and death were not the only Christian duties, but that Christ came to sanctify and beautify this present life, not till then did men begin to value Christ's coming at heaven's valuation.

The manner in which Christ's birthday was determined shows what a central place in his-

THE LEGEND OF THE CHRISTMAS ROSE

tory men were willing to accord to the infant King. Some said it was the twentieth of May, others the twentieth of April. The Eastern Church celebrated January the sixth. How should a uniform date be fixed for the nativity? It was on this wise. It was assumed that the world was created in the spring, because it was commanded to bring forth grass and herbs and it was made when the days and nights were of equal length. The "vernal equinox," March 25th, was therefore, fixed on as the exact date of the creation. If this was the date of creation, when the glorious light sprang out of darkness, what more simple and natural than to suppose that it was on this date, that the power of the Almighty overshadowed Mary and the Dayspring from on high entered into the world? It was a very simple thing to count from this date nine months ahead and come to December 25th as the exact date of Christ's birth. When you have done this, you are struck by a wonderful coincidence, for December 25th is the date of the winter solstice, the day when the world's darkness begins to lessen and the world's light to grow. This day the ancient world had long celebrated as the new birth of the all-conquering sun. Henceforth it was to be cele-

brated as the birthday of the Son of righteousness. All this is not history, nor is it fiction,—it is poetic fact. It is historical poetry. Never before was such poetry worked out of a list of dates. It is the kind of poetry which is much truer than history. It is a parable of the large room which the child-King had come to occupy in the world's life and thought.

The room which the Christ-spirit occupies at any one time, in the life of a nation or an individual, depends on the nation's or individual's capacity to take it in, just as the light of the sun is variously received by material substances. The dark brown earth receives little light while other objects such as stained glass windows, have transparent brightness, so that they not only receive much light, but they do not intercept it. They pass it on, colored with their own color, to other things.

One's capacity to take in the Christian spirit is determined largely by the degree to which his life is filled with other and lesser objects. It is a truism in matters of the spirit that a void must be created by the destruction of the false before the true can be received.

It is not the children who have the most things who enjoy the most the things they have. To give children all the pleasures in miniature

which belong to middle life, is a cruel kindness. It robs them of the keen sense of enjoyment because it leaves them no room for it. If the Christ-spirit is to be entertained with thankful and joyous hospitality, and not crowded out into the mangers of men's lives, room must be made and kept for it. Jesus was entertained in a manger his first night on earth for the simple reason that the inn was already full of less worthy guests. The pathos of this situation is the feeling which Merson seeks to convey in his picture of Mary's arrival in Bethlehem. The sight of Joseph and Mary left outside the inn in the lonely village street on a winter night touches a universal human emotion in all sympathetic hearts.

And yet it is true that Jesus, crowded out of the inn and into the stable is a parable in action of a constantly re-enacted tragedy. He is the Master of the Inn, and the best of all guests that visit the human soul, yet is often crowded out through lack of room.

"No room, O Babe Divine, for thee
That Christmas night, and even we
Dare shut our hearts and turn the key."

Whenever men do not make room for the best; whenever they fail to regard big things

as big and little things as little; whenever they fail to put first things first, and second things second, then the tragedy enacted at Bethlehem on the first Christmas night is enacted over again.

To have opportunity knock at one's door and fail to open the door is nothing short of tragedy. In one of the noblest of Christian poems, "Easter Day," Browning takes a man in vision away from things seen and ushers him into naked realities that he may get a perspective on life and weigh its worth.

A voice behind the beholder says:

"Life is done,
Time ends, Eternity's begun,
And thou art judged forevermore."

The doomed one had deliberately chosen the world,—the things of time and sense. For these he had fought and sighed. The truth of God, the best and noblest things, had not interested him. His sentence was that he should take and forever keep the partial good, the lower beauty for which he had struggled. He was at first transported with the idea. "Mine, the world?" he asked. "Yes," said the awful Judge, "if you are satisfied with one rose

thrown to you over the Eden barrier which excludes you from its glory,—take it.”

Our greatest punishment would be the gratification of our lowest aims. The Judge saw the thought in the man’s heart, read the joy, with which the sense of possessing all the beauty of the world filled it, and told him he was welcome thus to esteem the mere hangings of the vestibule of the Palace of the Supreme. The man read his error in the scorn of the awful gift and asked for Art in the place of Nature. That, too, was concealed; he should obtain the one form the sculptors had labored to abstract, the one face the painters tried to portray; the perfection in their soul which these only hinted at.

But the man was made to see that the perfection of form, the completeness of earthly things that can only serve earth’s ends, transferred to a future state, would be the dreariest deficiency. Neither the World nor the World of Art could suffice to satisfy his disembodied state, and he cried in anguish:

“Mind is best—
I will seize mind, forego the rest.”

And again it was answered to him that all

the best of Mind on earth, the intuitions, the grasps of guess, the efforts of the finite to comprehend the infinite, the gleams of heaven which come to sting with hunger for the full light of God, the inspiration of poetry, the truth hidden in fable,—all these were God's part, and in no wise to be considered as inherent in the mind of man. Loving God, he loves His inspirations; bereft of them, in the world he had chosen, Mind could not avail to light the cloud he had entered.

And so the bleeding spirit of the humbled man prays for love alone. And God said, "Is this thy final choice? Love is the best? 'Tis somewhat late! Love was all about thee curled in its mightiness around all thou hadst to do with. Take the show of love for the name's sake, but remember who created thee to love, died for love of thee and thou didst refuse to believe the story on the ground that the love was too much."

So the man awoke, and behold it was only a dream. Only a dream, but its design is to show any man who dreams it, the everlasting truth that it is always best to choose the best; it is always best to love the best; it is always best to give the best room to the Master of the Inn.

